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Digital Media and History Education from Students' Perspective: The Case of Albania

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Abstract: The paper aims to analyze the extent to and the ways in which digital media is incorporated in the teaching and learning of history in a tech-driven technology world. It starts with a critical qualitative review of literature concerning the advantages and pitfalls of utilizing digital media in history education. Furthermore, it uses survey research to gather students' perspectives on the integration of digital media in history classes in three Albanian universities. The scholarly findings reveal: first, educators utilize digital media only when it is deemed necessary; second, the number of students who use artificial intelligence for historical research is growing; third, students are predominantly historical content consumers rather than creators on the internet, and fourth, the development of digital skills among history students is imperative for critically, ethically and responsibly navigating the online environment. The study provides a dataset on the use of digital media in history education in three Albanian universities, which not only fills the gap in the existing research, but also sheds light on the challenges and the impact of utilizing digital media in history teaching and learning. The study's results are significant for scholars and educational policymakers and practitioners in the field.

Keywords: history teaching and learning; university; survey research; prosumer; digital literacy

1. Introduction

Digitalization is rapidly transforming our societies and its impact is immense on the lives of young people. According to Eurostat, 97% of youth in all EU countries reported using internet daily (Eurostat, 2024). Young people seem to be the most digitally connected age group in Albania, too. As highlighted in Center Science and Innovation for Development 2024 report (SCiDEV, 2024, p. 7), 79,8 % of Albanian youth regularly engage in internet. Although they spend too much time on online platforms, as the Youth Study Albania report states, only "40% of young people use the internet as part of their educational activities hardly or not at all" (Youth Study Albania, 2024, p. 12). This result shows that contrary to the National Strategy of Education (2021-2026), which encourages the utilization of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance higher education, both in terms of curriculum content and learning approaches (MASR, 2021, p. 101), it seems that the integration of ICT inside and outside auditorium remains limited.

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The development of the technology has brought about significant changes in education, by transforming the landscape of traditional learning, in which educators and textbooks were considered the main source of information (Luku, 2024). In a tech-driven world, the emergence of digital media has challenged the traditional teacher-centered approach to more student-centered learning (Geinnotta, 2022). By using digital tools, students "have access to an endless library of information, videos, podcasts, and online forums at their fingertips" (Melo, 2024). Their use can increase students' engagement and interest in learning (Pramono & Ahmad, 2022, p. 47), as well as their academic achievements (Okumuş, 2018, p. 42). As Abid Haleem et al. (2022) assert, "Educational resources and digital tools help to improve the classroom atmosphere and make the teaching-learning process more compelling" (p. 276). For Benjamin Gan et al. (2015), interactive digital media can enhance collaborative learning, as well as teacher-student relationships (Adeline, 2024, p. 58). In addition, digital media provides teachers with the opportunity to create personalized learning experiences that take care of the special needs of each student (Twyman, 2018, p. 4).

Nevertheless, the integration of digital media in education has presented its challenges for both educators and learners. One of the main hurdles is the digital divide, which refers to "unequal access to digital technologies, particularly concerning internet connectivity and device availability, alongside disparities in infrastructure, skills and affordability. These gaps result in unequal opportunities for information access and digital participation" (OECD, n.d.). Moreover, the so-called "digital natives" are to some extent competent and empowered to deal with digital media. They rarely question the reliability and the authenticity of the information obtained through digital media (Haydn & Ribbens, 2017, p. 740). As David Buckingham (2007) states "Rather than seeing the Web as a neutral source of "information", students need to be asking questions about the sources of that information, the interests of its producers and how it represents the world" (p. 113). Thus, educational institutions have to play a crucial role in developing students' digital literacy (Shopova, 2014), enabling them to use the technology in a responsible, safe and ethical way (Ribble & Miller, 2013). Furthermore, recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) require educational policymakers to regulate "the use of AI in schools and higher education institutions, as well as in preparing learners for an AI-driven future" (OECD, 2023, p. 44).

The rise of digital media and its ongoing evolution have had a significant impact on the way in which history is taught and learned inside and outside auditorium (Haydn & Ribbens, 2017, p. 735). Several studies underline the opportunities and challenges of integrating digital media in history education. Although a growing body of research has been published on the incorporation of digital media in history classes in Europe and beyond, this topic seems to have not received the attention of Albanian scholars. The few available studies in the field address the importance of media literacy in pre-university education (Musai et.al., 2011; ASCAP & UNICEF Office in Albania, 2020; Albanian Media Institute & ASCAP, 2021). These studies are mainly guidelines, which provide prescription or axioms and practical support for educators and learners concerning media and information literacy (MIL); however, no references are made to the integration of digital media in history education. Similarly, the study entitled *Guidelines for Inclusion of Media and Information Literacy in the University Curricula*, published by the Albanian Media Institute in 2023, provides an introductory framework for stakeholders in higher education regarding the incorporation of MIL either as a separate subject or as content included in the curriculum of existing subjects of the teaching branches of Albanian universities, or even as a teaching methodology (Çela et. al., 2023). Sonila Osmani and Doreta Tartari (2024) in their article: "The impact of digital technology on teaching and learning. A case study of schools in Durrës, Albania" uses a mixed-method approach to examine the benefits and obstacles of incorporating digital technology in 10 educational institutions in Durrës, without analyzing the use of any digital tool in the teaching of any

particular subject. Likewise, the article titled: "The Future Higher Education in Albania in the Digital Era–Challenges and Opportunities" authored by Etleva Babameto and Doriana Pano (2024) addresses the significance of reforming the higher education system making use of the new technology and digital developments, and uses a survey questionnaire to assess changes in students' perceptions of the blended mode of teaching and learning processes from 2020 to 2023.

Since none of the studies heretofore deals with the use of digital media in history education in Albanian universities, this study aims to fill the gap in the existing research and provide a comprehensive overview of the extent to and the ways in which digital media is integrated in history teaching and learning in Albania. It seeks to answer the following research questions: What types of digital media are integrated in history education? How often is digital media used in the process of teaching and learning? What is the aim of using digital media in history education? Are students able to critically evaluate the digital resources? Do students act as prosumers of media content? Do educators encourage the use of digital media in history education? etc. By answering these questions, the study creates a dataset on the use of digital media in history classes in Albanian universities, as well as provides compelling insights on students' digital literacy to critically and responsibly deal with historical representations and narratives available online.

2. Digital Media and History Education: Theoretical Perspectives

In the technological age we live in, digital media has its influence on history education as well. Scholars hold varying viewpoints on its impact on history teaching and learning. Some of them point out to the benefits from its use in history class, including the accessibility to a wide range of digital resources, such as "original manuscripts, government records, letters, photos, audios or film recordings that have been transferred into a digital format and made available via the internet" (King et al., 2019, p. 48). Their use helps students understand that there is no "single and complete truth" in history, but the past can be examined from various perspectives (Haydn & Ribbens, 2017, p. 750). Thus, the integration of digital media in history education, as Eunice Ndomondo (2024) asserts, "enables students' engagement in interactive learning and development of different points of view." According to Wong Lee King et al. (2019, p. 48), it enhances the learning process by making it engaging and thought-provoking, as students take on the role of historians, developing their historical thinking skills through inquiry, investigation and evidence-based conclusions. Moreover, the use of digital media when teaching and learning history contributes to challenging dominant narratives of history (McWhorter & Patterson, 2023) by offering critical perspectives that may not be represented in mainstream media and/or education. While Chinasa Iroabughichi Evurulobi et al. (2024) argue that "In the digital realm, history is not just a linear sequence of events but a dynamic and interactive space where the past, present, and future converge. This convergence allows for a more nuanced understanding of historical events, where users can "dive" into the past, creating a sense of control over historical narratives" (p. 2084). In addition, Osman Okumuş (2018, p. 46) states that this medium has made the studying of history more engaging and enjoyable, challenging the students' perception of it as difficult, abstract, boring and based on memorization, and encouraging them to spend more time on the subject. Furthermore, digital media provides students with the opportunity to be prosumers (Navio-Marco et al., 2004); namely it allows them not only to consume historical knowledge, but also to generate it. As Kathryn Kish Sklar (2002) admits, Web technology propels students "outside the box" and helps them become producers of new historical knowledge on the World Wide Web.

Other scholars are concerned about the accuracy of historical narratives and representations students find on the internet since they may retrieve information from unreliable and unauthoritative websites. "Online platforms have created a space where members of the public can participate in the production and sharing of information on a vast, unprecedented scale" (UNESCO and the United Nations, 2022, p. 14), which can also lead to a spread of misinformation and disinformation. As Janabeth Soguilon et al. assert (2024, p. 12), there is a prevalence of historical distortion in educational learning sources available online. Social media, which is the most widespread internet-based activity among young people (Eurostat, 2024), is fertile ground for disinformation and historical distortion (Soguilon et al., 2024, p. 12). Thus, students may be exposed to historical bias while navigating the web which can reinforce one-sided perspectives (Naffi & Davidson, 2020, p. 34). Since digital technology enables everyone to "do history" (Madsen-Brooks, 2013, p. 49), it can lead to a shallow understanding of complex historical events. Hence, students encounter on web oversimplified interpretations of history, which distort or ignore nuances and/ or the complexity of historical events and facts (Yorgun, 2024, p. 885). Young people may also use AI for historical research. Rahul Ranjan (2025) analyzing the AI generated historical analysis writes that "AI disproportionately pulls information from sources that may be riddled with biases, factual errors, or politically motivated distortions. This over-reliance on popular databases significantly increases the likelihood of spreading misinformation, as AI lacks the ability to independently verify claims."

Consequently, students' digital literacy, as well as regulations regarding the AI use in educational institutions seems to be imperative. On one hand, digital literacy skills enable students "to critically navigate, evaluate and create information using digital technologies" (Fournier-Sylvester, 2020, p. 53). For Ashley N. Woodson (2015, p. 256), students' active engagement with online historical content requires historical reasoning, including skills concerning their ability to evaluate different online primary and secondary sources. In a similar vein, Terry Haydn and Kees Ribbens (2017) argue that history teachers need "to get students to deploy appropriate historical method and rigour in the use of internet resources, in terms of referencing, provenance, questioning purposes and motives, and cross referencing" (p. 744). On the other hand, educators should not ignore generative artificial intelligence, but they must "help the next generation face the reality of the world and develop instruments and ways of navigating this reality with integrity" (Ross, 2023). Patrick Hickey (2024) argues that "AI-enabled platforms have made it possible to "conjure up" figures from the past, offering students the unique opportunity to engage in simulated interviews with a diverse range of historical characters. This innovative approach has not only captivated students' interests but also deepened their understanding of historical contexts and narratives." Similarly, Leandro Villela de Azevedo (2024), analyzing the use of ChatGPT in history education, mentions that it "not only maximizes interaction with each student, but also enriches the learning experience by allowing each student to receive personalized feedback."

3. Methodology

The study examined the incorporation of digital media in history education from students' perspectives. By using a survey research, it employed both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. The survey questions were designed based on a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and empirical data. The survey consisted of ten questions, exploring students' experiences and viewpoints on digital media in the teaching and learning of history. More specifically, the aim of the survey was to gather important data, including the types of digital media used inside and outside history classes, their frequency and purpose of use, the criteria for selecting online historical content, students' roles in media engagement, the impact of digital media on history education, encouragement from educators, the need for training, and their opinion on the necessity of integrating digital media in history teaching and

learning. Three open-ended questions were included in the survey in order to provide a space for the participants to freely share their experiences and thoughts on the use of digital media in history education.

The purposive sampling was used in this study aimed at selecting respondents who were most likely to provide relevant and valuable information. The branch of study, the geographic distribution, the technological availability, students' background diversity were the main criteria for sampling. Specifically, the sample consisted of students enrolled in History, History and International Relations and History-Geography, respectively from the University of Tirana, "Aleksandër Moisiu" University of Durrës and "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University of Elbasan. The survey was conducted from March 26 to April 5, 2025, and the students' participation in the study was voluntary. The respondents were assured of the survey's anonymity in order to ensure they provided open and honest responses. In total, 34 students participated in the study. The sample of 34 is considered sufficient compared to the overall number of students pursuing studies in the abovementioned programs at the respective universities. The data gathered from the sample allow us to draw conclusions about the use of digital media in history education. Although a larger sample size would have increased the statistical power of the analysis, our study lays the foundation for future research in the field.

4. Research Results

This study gathered students' viewpoints on the integration of digital media in history education, their ability to use digital tools, and the impact and importance of incorporating digital media when teaching and learning history. In the first section of the research, dealing with the types of digital media, the purpose and their frequency of use in history classes, three questions were posed to the students. When asked "Which digital media do you use in history?", the majority of the respondents (36%) answered websites and blogs (news platforms, online articles and personal blogs), followed by artificial intelligence (chatGPT, chatbots, etc.) (26%). The percentage of students who responded social media was equal to those who stated streaming services (YouTube, Netflix, etc.) and e-books and digital publication. Very few students responded podcasts and audiobooks (5%) and virtual and augmented reality (3%). In regard to the question "How often is digital media used in history teaching?", almost half of the respondents answered "sometimes." The respondents' percentage-based answers are shown in Figure 1.

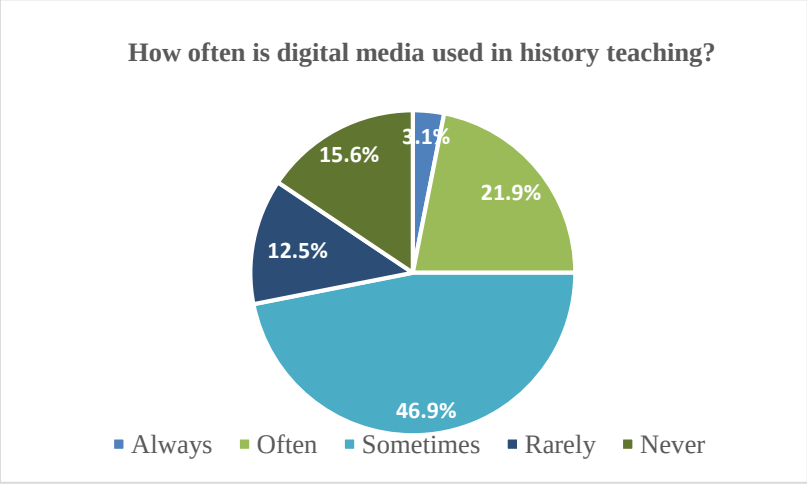


Figure 1. Frequency of using digital media in history teaching

Students were also asked about the aim of using digital media in history education. Based on their responses, they are most likely to use it to obtain preliminary information on the topic (45.2%). More specifically, the frequency distribution of their responses are displayed in Figure 2.

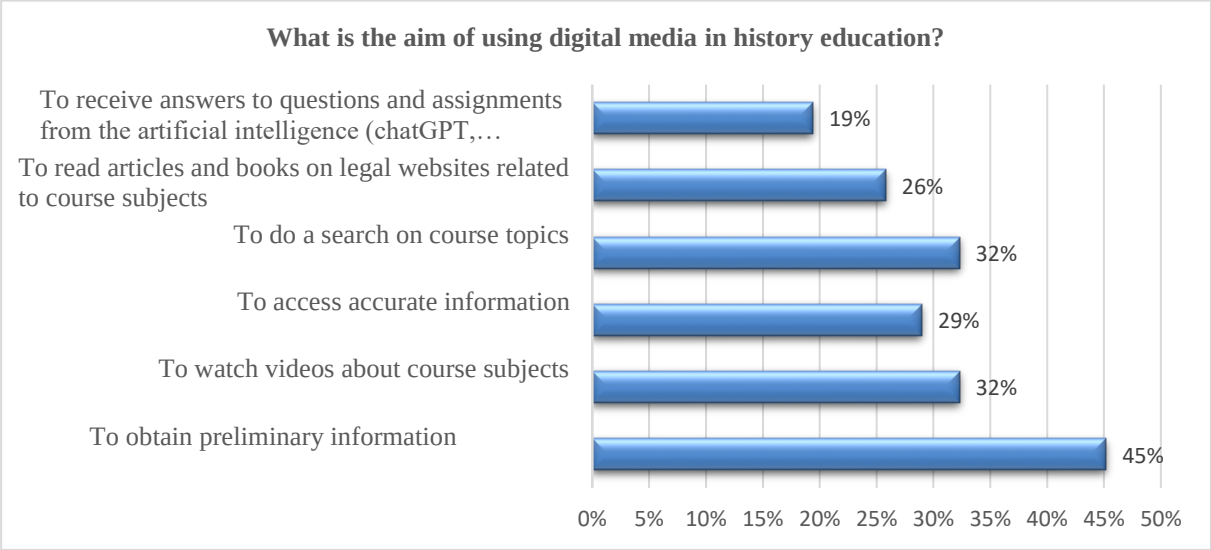


Figure 2. Frequency distribution based on students' aim of using digital media in history education

The second section of the research discusses students' digital literacy. When asked "What criteria do you use to select the historical content in digital media?", the majority of the respondents answered the source of information (64.5%), followed by the quality and reliability of the source (54.8%) and the interest in the topic (35.5%), as illustrated in Figure 3. According to these results, students seem to be confident with the use of digital resources in education, as they pay attention to the reliability and the credibility of the sources and websites. However, these results are at odds to the response of the question about the necessity of attending training on the use of digital media when learning history, to which over 95% of the survey participants answered positively.

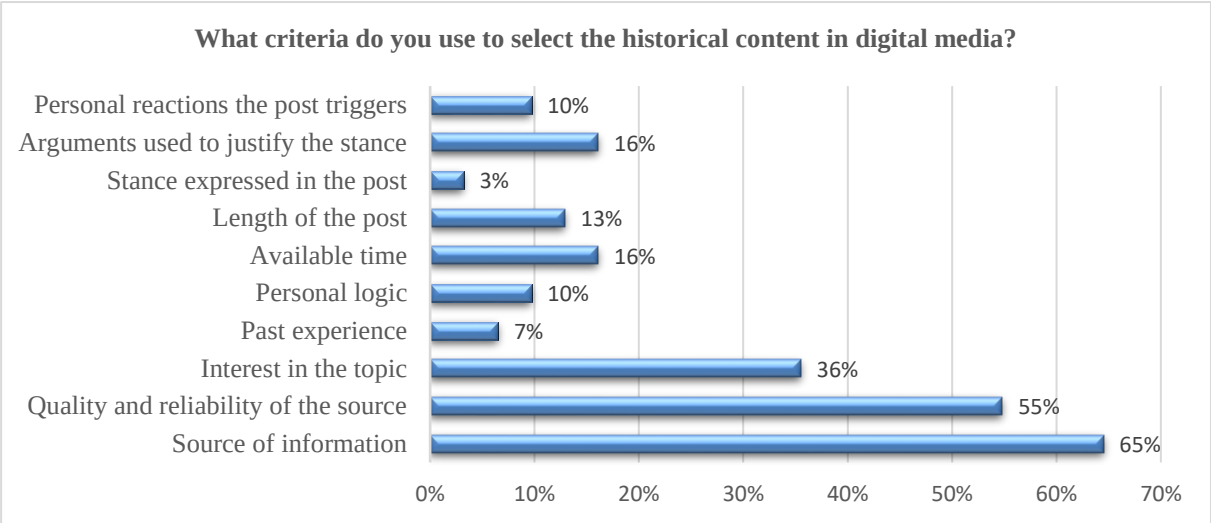


Figure 3. Distribution according to the criteria used to select the historical content in digital media

In relation to the question "What is your role in using digital media when learning history?", the percentage of students who responded "search for information" was quite the same as those who answered "both" (search for and create information), as shown in Figure 4. By contrast, when survey

participants were asked "Have you produced historical content on online platforms?", the majority of them (90%) answered negatively. Even those few respondents who stated that they had created historical content online, didn't specify which platform.

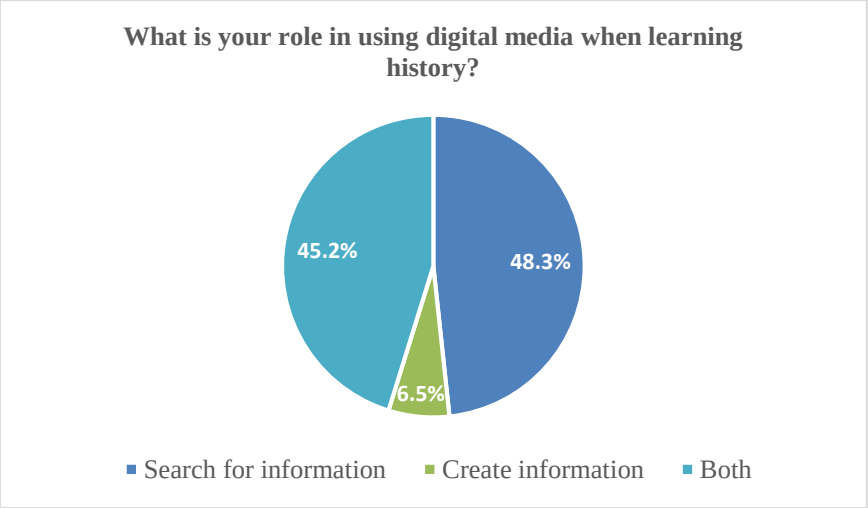


Figure 4. Distribution based on student's role in using digital media when learning history

The last section of the research examines students' evaluations of digital media use and its impact on the teaching and learning process. Based on students' responses, educators incorporate digital tools in history education only when it is necessary. When asked "In what ways has digital media affected your history learning experience?", most of the respondents (48.4%) answered "It has offered multiple perspectives on a historical issue", followed by "It has increased interest in learning history" and "It has provided brief and simplified content for complex historical events", both with the same percentage (35.5%). One out of five respondents reported that "It has reinforced a particular stance on a historical issue." Fewer respondents stated that "It has increased peer collaboration for conducting historical research" and "It has enabled real-time discussions and debates on historical issues", as illustrated in Figure 5.

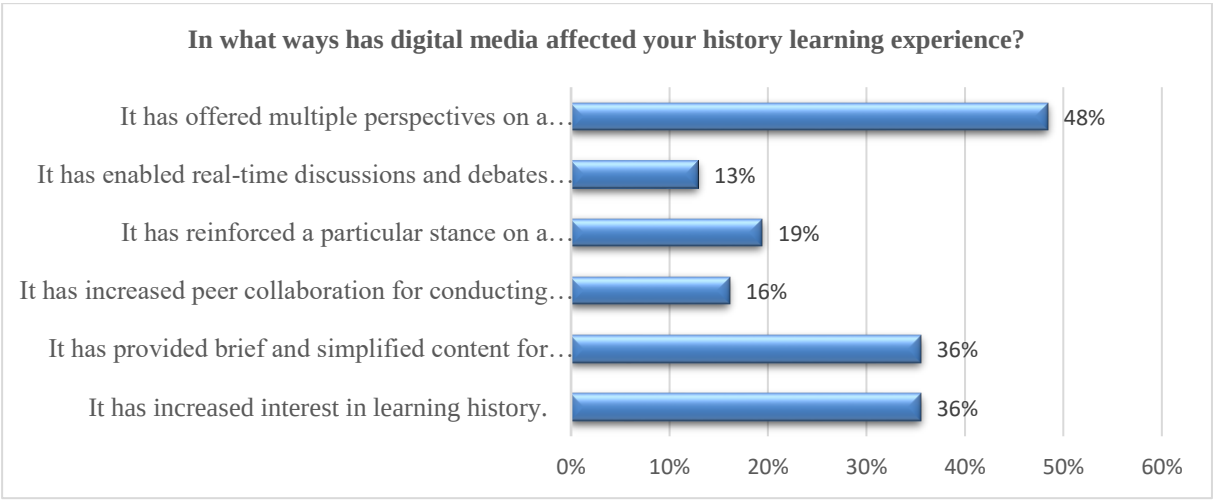


Figure 5. Distribution according to the impact of digital media on students' history learning experience

The final question sought students' opinion on the integration of digital media in history teaching and learning. Half of the respondents, who replied, gave a positive answer. One respondent answered: "Yes. We can have acces to a fast-moving information flow." Another one responded: "Yes, it should be used.

When you see something, it feels as if you are experiencing history firsthand." A respondent elaborated on their answer as follows: "Instructing us how to share materials online seems interesting, but given the current level of students, it may be difficult and unrealistic due to a lack of interest. The use of social media platforms (such as TikTok or Instagram) or artificial intelligence (like ChatGPT) doesn't seem very practical, as we often become too dependent on the information we receive from online platforms. In order to use these tools, we should be taught to treat them as sources for collecting diverse information rather than allowing them to be the main focus of our work". As reflected in their answers, students appear to be aware of the benefits of using digital media in history education, as well as of the significance of acquiring digital skills in order to navigate the web with discernment and critical insight.

5. Discussion

The growth of digital media has marked a pivotal shift in the way history is taught and learned. As Stéphane Lévesque (2014) states, "for today's secondary school and university students, technology plays an integral part in their learning experiences" (p. 43). The Albanian Ministry of Education and Sport has given priority to the integration of ICT in the teaching/learning process, including the equipment of the educational institutions with technological tools, as well as the cultivation of digital skills among educators and students (Osmani & Tartari, 2024, p. 196). Nevertheless, from students' perspective, educators sometimes incorporate digital media for teaching history.

According to the survey results, over 60% of the respondents used website and blogs, as well as artificial intelligence to obtain information for educational purposes. A similar percentage of respondents answered that the aim of using digital media is to obtain preliminary information on the topic and receive answers to questions and assignments from the artificial intelligence. Since the majority of the respondents prefer easily accessible digital media content and AI-generated one to complete the tasks assigned by the professor, it is imperative to teach students to double-check and cross-reference the online historical content. As Singh and Ahmad (2022, p. 260) assert, online platforms contain facts of the past that have been manipulated or distorted. For this reason, their use in history education needs a critical approach.

Furthermore, over one third of the respondents stated that the integration of digital media in history learning has provided short and simplified content for complex historical events. The oversimplification of the historical representations available online can lead to a loss of nuance and complexity, making it challenging for students to fully understand the historical events (Stanley & Metzger, 2023). Based on the survey results, the majority of the respondents consumed historical content on the web rather than produced it. Even respondents who confirmed creating content on online platforms, did not provide additional information about which platform. For Nicole Fournier-Sylvester (2020, p. 45), young people should be able to critically reflect on what they are creating and/or consuming online, which corresponds to students' responses that emphazise their need for trainings on the usage of digital media in history education. Thus, making good use of digital media in teaching and learning history contributes to improving "students' historical thinking skills, fostering students' historical inquiry, encouraging them to view a historical event in a multi perspective way, helping students to gain a deeper understanding of a past event and motivating them to learn history" (King et al., 2019, p. 47).

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